

*W. E. Colby*  
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
*W. E. Colby*  
*12/24*

23 December 1975

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I asked my analysts to consider how determined the Soviets will be in support of the MPLA in various Angolan contingencies. The results--not at all cheerful--are attached.

Respectfully,

*W. E. Colby*  
W. E. Colby  
Director

Attachment

MORI/CDF Pages 2-5 per C03213721

NSS review completed.

## THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

### MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Future of the Soviet Commitment in Angola

1. Moscow's performance in Angola over the past several months bespeaks a rather tough and unyielding cast of mind regarding its support for the MPLA. The Soviets have been unflinching in the face of the countervailing pressures that have arisen, both in Africa and the US, during those months. Moscow seems to be saying, both on the ground in Angola and in its public utterances, that it is willing to go a significant distance to support an MPLA victory.

2. Moscow is also saying that appeals to the idea of detente will not deter the Soviet Union from pursuing what it regards as its legitimate role as a world power. Angola has become the occasion, perhaps intentionally, more likely fortuitously, for the Soviets to make a point that they have been anxious to assert since the brouhahas over Vietnam and Somalia, namely, that the Soviet Union will not allow the US to establish the ground rules of detente. This means that if the US, for domestic reasons, cannot bring its power to bear in a given arena, then it will be compelled to accept the consequences. The Soviet Union will not, out of a magnanimous spirit, forego opportunities to strengthen its position in the world or use its influence to protect US interests.

3. In their present frame of mind, the Soviets are unresponsive to arguments that their actions in Angola will unduly complicate their broader relations with the US. The detente atmosphere was palpably soured over trade, emigration and SALT II before Angola became a political issue between the two countries. The Soviets are also likely to view as hypocritical complaints about the incompatibility

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of detente and Angola in the light of extensive US publicity over Chile and assassinations and against real US gains at Moscow's expense in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, as well as Portugal. The Soviets are skeptical that Washington will step back from a SALT agreement because of Angola, or will refuse to market its surplus grain in the Soviet Union because the MPLA strengthens its hold on Luanda. The Soviets probably calculate that real interests of the two countries are at the heart of the actual rather than the rhetorical detente relationship and that the impact of Angola is not likely to be of lasting consequence.

4. This kind of analysis would commend itself to Brezhnev because he has strong domestic political reasons for pursuing a tough line now on Angola. It is a place where he can demonstrate that detente not only creates opportunities for "social progress," but also does not inhibit the Soviet Union from taking advantage of them. Angola, to some extent, offsets Cunhal's reversal in Portugal, the disappointment of Helsinki, the policy debacle in Egypt. With detente providing few concrete gains, and the Party Congress approaching, he probably finds it politic to stress orthodox ideological themes.

#### The Near Future

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5. The factors which have contributed to Moscow's Angola policy could change in significant ways over the next few months.

6. If Brezhnev gets through the Party Congress in good shape, politically as well as physically, he may feel under less pressure to show that he is willing and able to stand up to the Americans. The pain associated with the setbacks in agriculture and the economic retrenchment may be less

obstrusive. The Soviets may therefore feel somewhat less defensive vis-a-vis the US and less compelled to demonstrate that they are dealing from a position of strength. Any progress on bilateral issues such as SALT would tend to refocus attention on the detente relationship and relegate, in the eyes of the world as well as the leaders in Moscow, Angola to the wings. This would then make it easier for Moscow to cut a deal on Angola.

7. As we move into the next year, the Soviets will also be paying more attention to the impact of their actions on US politics. The Kremlin will, of course, want to avoid giving the US reason to believe that it has significant leverage because of Moscow's desire to abet the electoral fortunes of the supporters of detente. But Angola is the kind of place where the Soviets can afford to show some restraint in the interest of not poisoning the atmosphere during the elections.

8. But whether such "restraint" will be forthcoming will also depend greatly on the situation on the ground in Angola. At one end of the spectrum, the Soviets are unlikely to show much restraint if there is a serious threat to the continued existence of the MPLA in Luanda. Moscow cannot afford another highly visible defeat, particularly between now and the Party Congress, and particularly in a situation like Angola where the "victor" will be seen to be the US. If this contingency threatened, we would expect the Soviets to send in more arms, more Cubans, and more of their own advisors. We strongly doubt that the Soviets will commit their own ground forces in significant numbers. The Soviets are likely to assert a presence with a token force of a few ships out of the Mediterranean, and respond to any larger US show of naval force.

9. At the other end of the spectrum, Angola does not yet figure so prominently in Soviet priorities that Moscow feels a strong imperative for an early and decisive victory there. But Moscow is not likely to apply significant pressure on Neto or the Cubans to refrain from significantly strengthening their territorial position, or routing the FNLA and Unita if that seems possible with the forces and material at hand

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or in the pipeline. The dynamic of the patron-client relationship is such that the Soviets would have a hard time keeping the MPLA reined in if victory appeared to be ahead. The problem is made worse by the Cubans who would make league with Neto in arguing that the Soviets should not rob them of the fruits of their efforts for reasons unrelated to Angola. Under these circumstances, it would be very hard for Brezhnev, or any other Soviet leader, to actively thwart the MPLA, (for example, by constricting the supply flow) at the behest of Washington.

10. This does not mean that the MPLA has a blank check. A gradual victory in Angola, which minimized the complications on the detente front while giving the Soviet Union what it wants, would be the ideal outcome for Moscow. If the Soviets judged that events were moving in this fashion, they would probably resist pressures from their clients to support a course aimed at a dramatic early victory.

11. If the conflict seemed to settle into a prolonged and indecisive stalemate, strong MPLA pressures would arise for an increase in aid, but it would also probably lead other Africans to argue more strongly for a political compromise. The Soviets probably have not yet made up their minds about how to handle this possibility. If it confronted them, the state of their relations with the US in general would be a factor in their reaction and we believe would lead them to accept some compromise solution rather than holding out and pressing for an MPLA "victory" over vigorous US counter-support of the FLNA and UNITA. If they had to make such a decision now, however, it looks as though they would opt for raising their Angolan stake, in the belief that the US is not likely to engage sufficiently to prevent them.

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*Pres 12/28*

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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SECRET/SENSITIVE/XGDS

ACTION

December 24, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR BRENT SCOWCROFT

FROM:

Mr. Clift 

SUBJECT:

CIA Assessment -- Future of Soviet Commitment  
in Angola

On December 24, the Director of Central Intelligence sent the President an Agency assessment of how determined the Soviet Union will be to support the MPLA in various Angolan contingencies in the near term.

The memorandum for your signature to the President at Tab I would forward the text and a summary of the main points of the Agency report.

RECOMMENDATION

That you forward Director Colby's assessment with the memorandum at Tab I.

cc: Hal Horan

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